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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003219

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [RS](#) [IS](#) [LY](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: DFM SALTANOV ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, LIBYA,  
AND SOMALIA PIRATES

MOSCOW 00003219 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During an October 31 meeting with the Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Saltanov provided a positive assessment of the Egyptian-brokered Palestinian talks and indicated GOR hopes for concrete progress at the November 9 meeting between the factions in Cairo. Calling for resumed talks between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon, he pledged continued Russian support for the Middle East Peace Process and stressed that a planned Russian-sponsored Middle East conference next year should only take place if it could move the process forward. Saltanov characterized Russian-Libyan relations as growing and promising, but downplayed reports of a potential \$2 billion arms sale deal, stating that no major agreements were expected during Libyan leader Qaddafi's October 31-November 2 visit to Russia. On the Somalia pirate issue, Saltanov expressed appreciation for the cooperation between the U.S. and Russian governments and agreed that a long term solution is tied to the stabilization of the political situation in Somalia. End Summary.

"Russian Support for the Peace Process Will Never be a Problem"

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¶2. (C) In response to the Ambassador's inquiry about the outcomes the GOR hoped to see from the November 9 Quartet Foreign Ministers' meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh and the Egyptian-sponsored talks among the Palestinian factions in Cairo, Saltanov indicated that Russia would support an agreement between Hamas and Fatah on ways to create a viable government for the Palestinian people based on national consensus, as well as measures to create the right conditions for presidential and parliamentary elections in the near future. Noting that all Palestinian factions had expressed a wish to achieve reconciliation but the task was "truly not simple," Saltanov said that the GOR nevertheless considered the process to be moving in a positive direction. He noted that a Palestinian consensus about governance was especially important for progress in the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, as President Mahmoud Abbas needed a wider support base to bolster his mandate to negotiate with the Israelis. The peace process could not move forward without first a reconciliation among the Palestinian groups.

¶3. (C) Saltanov indicated that the MFA "in principle" was still planning for a spring, 2009 Middle East conference that would continue the Annapolis process. However, he stressed that the main task was to ensure that such a meeting would be effective in moving the peace process forward and in leading all sides to a resolution of the outstanding issues: "We are not looking to hold a conference just for its own sake." In this regard, the GOR would support continued talks between

Israel and Syria, as well as efforts to press for progress in the Israeli-Palestinian track. Although political upheaval in Israel had led to the suspension of the Turkish-brokered talks, Saltanov believed that there was still time before the February elections for Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to achieve something concrete. Similarly, a resumption of Israeli-Lebanese talks that moved the parties beyond the familiar rhetoric was needed. Only when there was movement in the peace process could a full normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world be achieved. Noting that the United States and Russia have enjoyed a close cooperation on Middle East issues, Saltanov assured the Ambassador that "you will never have a problem with Russian support of the peace process."

#### Qaddafi in Town but No Major Deals Expected

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14. (C) In response to the Ambassador's inquiry about Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's October 31-November 2 visit to Moscow, Saltanov indicated that bilateral relations between Russia and Libya since the removal of UN sanctions had been growing at a healthy pace. In particular, Vladimir Putin's April visit to Tripoli, the first by a Russian president, was noteworthy in the number of commercial agreements signed. Russian companies currently had a significant presence in the Libyan market, while technical military cooperation between the two countries was growing. Bypassing rumors that Qaddafi was in town to discuss a \$2 billion arms sales deal, Saltanov stated that no significant agreements would result from the visit, but the bilateral discussions would nevertheless foster prospects for closer economic and military cooperation. Asked where the Colonel would pitch his tent, Saltanov laughed and guessed a patch of land inside the Kremlin could be found.

MOSCOW 00003219 002.2 OF 002

#### Somalia Piracy Problem Depended on Solution on Land

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15. (C) Turning to Somalia, Saltanov expressed appreciation for the U.S.-Russia cooperation with regard to the Faina situation off the coast of Somalia. Looking toward a long-term response to the piracy problem in the region, he agreed with the Ambassador that the solution lay not at sea, but by supporting efforts to foster effective governance and combat lawlessness in the region.

BEYRLE